

SUMMER 2006

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Living and Good Farming – Connecting People, Land, and Communities



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CORNELL
Small Farms
Program



Photo by Jason Houston

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY - Summer 2006

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On our cover: Elizabeth Keen of Indian Line Farm (the first CSA in the USA) planting lettuce.
Photo by Jason Houston

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Farming and Good Living —
Connecting People, Land, and Communities

Small Farm Quarterly is for farmers and farm families — including spouses and children - who value the quality of life that smaller farms provide.

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- Celebrate the Northeast region's smaller farms;
- Inspire and inform farm families and their supporters;
- Help farmers share expertise and opinions with each other; and
- Increase awareness of the benefits that small farms contribute to society and the environment.
- Share important research, extension, and other resources.

Small Farm Quarterly is produced by Lee Publications, Inc., and is distributed four times a year as a special section of *Country Folks*. Volume 4 publication dates: July 10 and October 10, 2006; January 8 and April 10, 2007

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HOME AND FAMILY

On Raising Rural Kids -- The Value of Shooting Sports

By Celeste Carmichael

While I was working on my undergraduate degree in biology, I got it in my head that I should learn to hunt deer. I loved fishing and learned so much about the environment and biology from fishing... that hunting seemed like a natural progression. My dad had a good friend that hunted, who agreed to take me along some time.

The day came. It was snowy, and, as I recall - quite cold. My expectation was that we would go out, take a few shots, come home clean the deer, take some pictures... were you laughing yet? My vision was, as it turns out, completely out of whack. I didn't realize at the time that hunting is about much more than the kill.

Needless to say, we never even saw a deer that day. Several hours into the adventure I was cold, tired of being quiet... and ready to call it a day. Looking back, my hunting buddy was completely unbothered by the cold, quiet, deer-free time in the woods.

Although I never did take up the sport, I have come to appreciate that hunters typically value all of the side benefits to the sport - learning patience, spending time with family and friends, learning to look for cues and clues for the natural world, and learning and passing on tips and safety information. I'm especially impressed with the focus on safety that true sportsmen have.

Shooting sports is a very rewarding activity for a wide audience of people - young (12 and up) and not so young, men and women, people from varied backgrounds; and, it seems, especially appropriate for our rural families. I thought you might appreciate a look at the value of shooting sports as a family recreational activity, and the inherent need for safety education. First we'll look at what the research has to say, and then we'll hear from a practitioner of the sport.

ON RISKS

A comprehensive study of sports injuries in the United States (American Sports Data, 2002) ranks hunting injuries low on the list of injuries per 100 participants. In fact, hunting ranks 29th on the list -- behind basketball, baseball, aerobics and most of the other typical sports that you can name. Perceived risk is certainly a different story. I remind myself of this regularly as I tuck my kids into the car - since driving is the riskiest thing we routinely do. In fact, it is said that the most dangerous part of a hunt is the drive to the hunting area.

Taken further, the deer can be considered more hazardous than the sport. Nationwide, more people are killed by deer colliding with motor vehicles (100-150 per year) than are killed in hunting-related shooting accidents (fewer than 100 fatal hunting-related shootings, including self-inflicted accidents).

ON SAFETY

With risk in perspective, it is important to note that accidents do happen to sportsmen and women - some that involve firearms and some that do not (such as falling from a treestand). The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation recently distributed a report citing 2005 as the safest year on record for hunting. Hunt-

ing injuries have progressively been decreasing over the last fifty years. The report shares the stories behind this year's accidents.

These stories confirm that accidents may happen, but one can be prevented. Education is many of the first steps to accident prevention and to this end there are many hunter safety education courses run through the Department of Environmental Education, Cornell Cooperative Extension and sportsman's associations. You likely know, too, that all first time hunters must pass a 10 hour or longer hunter education course before obtaining a license. And, for the record, hunter and especially bow hunter education classes cover treestand safety to educate hunters about other potential hazards.

ON BUILDING CONSERVATIONISTS

Time in the woods and the outdoors does help young people to develop a relationship with the environment. Seems logical... and it has been proven. A recent study from the Cornell University Department of Human Development, links non-formal outdoor activities with positive attitudes and behaviors about the environment in adulthood. Previous studies have found that nature around a home can help protect children against life stress and boost children's cognitive functioning. All good reasons to be sure we are spending time outdoors, as a family, with our children.

FROM THE FIELD

The intent of this column is to share some statistics, research, and by way of an interview... a reality check. This edition's interview... is Joan Bennett. Although Joan now lives in California, Kentucky - she spent many years as a volunteer leader working with youth in the 4-H Shooting Sports program in Washington County, New York.

Q: Joan, how did you come to volunteer your time with youth interested in shooting sports?

A: I've lived on some sort of a farm most all my life. I've raised horses, calves, pigs, rabbits, guinea pigs, poultry, water fowl, raccoons, sheep and goats. And, of course, there has always been a dog or two and the cats. My boys and I rode saddle horses in gymnasiums for years. It was very special for me to spend that kind of time with my sons.

Then my sons became interested in shooting sports. Although I took my first hunter safety course and got my license as a young adult... I didn't become really involved until the kids had an interest. I learned to enjoy the sport and built confidence as a leader because of them. It was great to spend time together, plus it was important to model good safety practices for the kids. And, we had so much fun.

Beyond hunting, we really enjoyed archery and skeet shooting. The kids could physically see their growth and improvement by looking at the archery target. They saw that persistence pays off. That's the way they learned to master new things. There was so much satisfaction in that.

Q: What motivated you to want to learn to hunt... and pass it on?

A: Originally, I learned to hunt because my family did it. My parents (both mom & dad), grandfather, uncles and aunts all hunted and I wanted to fit in so I wanted to go hunting with them.

As my children became interested, I got involved to spend time with them. Over 20 years ago I became a project leader and later the organizational leader for the Adamsville Greenjackets 4-H Club. I met many super people and took part in many trainings myself. I went on many trips with my "kids" (as I always called all of them).

I continued to be active after my kids were all grown because I enjoyed seeing how this sport helps kids to grow.

Q: Who taught you to hunt and safely use firearms?

A: I took hunter safety with Charlie Fountain from Hawks Corners in Hartford, NY when I was 15 or 16. I still remember him well. I also learned tips from family and my boys' father.

Q: How should hunters (young and not so young) best prepare themselves to safely enjoy the sport?

A: Hunter Safety Courses taught us the proper uses of firearms and archery. At the time my boys started Shooting Sports, there were many people jacking deer, my boys learned about the right and wrongs of the law from D.E.C. officers as well as from all their instructors of the program.

Q: What advice would you give a family whose children are interested in shooting sports? **A:** My son Joe has hunted with his family for many years. Now that Joe's daughter Jessica has taken and passed both hunter safety and bow hunter safety she will hunt with her dad, uncles and possibly her grandfathers. I feel this has brought Joe and Jessica closer together, because it is special time spent together alone, there are three younger siblings that take up their dad's time also, plus his job.

As long as youth and adults follow the rules and the laws for hunting, take extra time to be safe, and do the right thing we won't have any problems.

I suggest that all parents (men & women) get involved in any way possible that



they can with their children. Even if parents are already hunters themselves they should take part in the safety education and shooting sports programs along with their children. Both will learn a great deal from the program, as well as having some extra quality time to spend together. Involving parents makes this a great family activity.

Thanks Joan for your comments! Clearly, shooting sports has been a great activity for Joan to share with her family and many youth over the years. Skills such as personal/self discipline, respect, ethical stance, wilderness interpretation, confidence, personal responsibility, leadership skills and communication skills are all benefits of this sport, which can be an activity that lasts a lifetime.

Celeste Carmichael is State 4-H Program Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension. If you would like to nominate a friend (or yourself) for an interview in this column contact Celeste at 607-255-4799 or ccj17@cornell.edu. Any topic related to rural youth will be considered.

Safety Basics

The National Shooting Sports Foundation provides the following safety guidelines for families:

- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded
- Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction
- Keep fingers off the trigger.
- Keep the firearm unloaded when not in use.
- Don't rely on your firearm's "safety" device.

Want to know more about studies related to shooting sports? Here are a couple of websites to get you started:

- NYS DEC www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dwmr/sportsed/index.html
- National Shooting Sports Foundation www.nssf.org
- 4-H Shooting Sports Program www.nys4hshooting.sports.org

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COMMUNITY/WORLD

Community Saves Farm From Jaws Of Development, Feeds Self Instead

By Madeleine Charney

As the fertile Pioneer Valley looks on, valuable Massachusetts farm land is permanently snatched away and lost to development. Fortunately, there are forces afoot to counter that tragic trend.

The North Amherst Community Farm (NACF), a non profit land trust, launched a new CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in North Amherst, MA this spring. The 38-acre property boasts views of Mt. Warner, walking trails, a wetland stream, and a wildlife corridor. The group's vision includes creating more equitable access to fresh, organic produce for the 10,000 people living within a 1-1/2 mile radius of the farm.

But more than that, NACF plans to strengthen the bonds within this diverse community through its educational and cultural programming, raising awareness of the connection between food production and distribution and the health of the environment. Their right-hand man: Vegetable

farmer, Jeremy Barker-Plotkin.

HEALTH-CONSCIOUS FARMER SEARCH OF LIKE-MINDED FARMER

Last spring Jeremy was driving around with an eye for farming opportunities when he spied Dan Gallagher pounding a "Looking for Farmer" sign into the ground. After a lengthy process of sorting through proposals from various farmers, Jeremy and his wife Audrey were selected as the right match for the project. Their operation, Simple Gifts Farm, was already established in Belchertown, and has now been transferred to the new CSA site.

Joining the Barker-Plotkins are Marcy Lowy, veterinarian, and her husband Dave Tepler, livestock farmer, who will raise grass-fed animals on the land for meat and eggs. Rotating the livestock pastures with the organic vegetables fields will maintain healthier soil and reduce pests.

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

Gallagher, co-president of NACF and an Amherst resident, was one of the early participants who took action when the property was slated for the development chopping block. Economic conditions pushed the owners, the Dziekanowski family, to sell the family farm. The fetching price: \$1.2 million. However, NACF was able to turn the project into a different animal.

According to Steve Dunn, NACF's other co-president, donations from at least 250 contributors amounted to nearly \$140,000. In addition, the Town of Amherst contributed \$100,800 from Community Preservation Act funds. Bundled together with \$355,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, development rights will be jointly held by the town and the state. The Dziekanowskis, who could have asked a higher price from developers, offered an additional \$600,000 in the form of a 30-year low-interest loan. They made this choice to assure that the land would be farmed in perpetuity.

Says Dunn, "The value of the land greatly exceeds what a farm operation can generate." For that reason, he encourages community members to continue their support with hands-on assistance as well as monetary



Dave Tepler (left) will raise livestock while Jeremy Barker-Plotkin (right) will raise produce for the new North Amherst Community Farm CSA. Photo by Jonathan von Ransan

tary assistance. Do you like to write or take photographs? Then you might like to contribute to the farm's newsletter. Do you like physical activity? Consider helping with building and maintenance projects. Computer savvy? The website needs maintaining. Ongoing fundraising is another area where more heads and hands are greatly needed.

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND, THIS LAND IS MY LAND

Hosts of people in the community have been stepping up to the plate, donating expertise, labor and time. Bruce Coldham of Coldham Architects, LLC will advise on the construction and renovation of buildings. Shaul Perry of Sunwood Builders volunteered to build a farm stand where produce will be sold to passersby. Ruth Hazard, of the Department of Plant, Soil and Insect Sciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has been instrumental in the hiring process and defining the terms of the lease.

"It is this collective, grass roots effort that's making [the farm] work," Dunn emphasized. He also credited the non profit organization Equity Trust for their dedication to educating NACF about economic options and strategies. Like NACF, Equity Trusts views economics as a web of relationships, the relationship of individuals to one another, the communities that we live within, and the earth that sustains us.

To that end, plans are already underway for a children's garden and ongoing projects with two local elementary schools. Commu-

nity members will be exposed to ecological innovations such as the use of renewable energy as the farm installs photovoltaics for heating buildings, a compost-heated greenhouse, and Jeremy Barker-Plotkin's own "grease truck," which is fueled by used cooking oil.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

CSA Shares are offered on a sliding-scale basis, from \$375-\$425 with produce and meat available June through October. The goal is to recruit 100 members this season and increase to up to 200 in the future. Work shares will allow ten eligible members to work in exchange for a reduced rate. All members are encouraged to contribute one harvest shift, thereby reducing the workload for the farmers and increasing their sense of connection to the land.

North Amherst Community Farm is located at 1089 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002. For information about the CSA, contact Jeremy Barker-Plotkin at jbp@the-spa.com or 413-323-8468. For information about contributing time or funds, call 413-549-0722 or visit NACF's website at www.nacfonline.org/.

Madeleine Charney is Information Resources Manager with the New England Small Farm Institute and a member of the Small Farm Quarterly Editorial Team. She can be reached at madeleinec@smallfarm.org or 413-323-4531. This article first appeared in the NACF MA News May-June 2006, and is used with permission.

Coming soon to
NACF

Simple Gifts Farm

CSA
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jbp@the-spa.com

The Barker-Plotkins kept their business name, Simple Gifts Farm, and transferred it from Belchertown to the new site in North Amherst.

Check out Cornell's
Small Farms Web Site!
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- Your wife finds nuts and bolts in the bottom of her handbag instead of loose change.
- An afternoon off means getting up four hours earlier.

GRAZING

Grazing Takes Center Stage

NYS Conference on "Strategies For Going Grass-Fed" Sells Out!

By Troy Bishopp and Joanna Green

Cornell's Small Farms Program was pleased to be one of numerous cosponsors for a landmark gathering of grazing enthusiasts this spring. A capacity crowd of two hundred farmers, educators, agency folks, and household chefs from all over the Northeast welcomed a host of seasoned, practical farmer-speakers on the subject of pasture, perhaps the Northeast's most promising agricultural asset.

Opening speakers included Assemblyman Bill Magee, Agriculture Committee Chairman, who praised the idea of using the grasslands more efficiently to stimulate the palates of the consumers who are asking for these products. NYS Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Brennan was excited to see the passion for pasture in the crowd.

He spoke of the environmental, social and financial benefits that grazing offers the farmers in this region. He and his staff promised to continue to work for constituents to enhance this critical resource for the viability of New York agriculture.

And then it was on to the real grazing experts -- farmers! Keynote speaker and author of *No-Risk Ranching*, Missouri grazier Greg Judy was passionate about the opportunities for contract grazing on leased land. He described how he uses over 500 beef cows, 300 hair sheep, goats, horses and Tamworth pigs to reclaim and maintain 11,300 acres of otherwise idle land. He talked about relationships with landowners, lease agreements, fencing and stocking strategies, and wildlife conservation. His enthusiasm fired up the crowd over and over again throughout the day.

Renowned Indiana seasonal dairyman Dave Forgy was just as enthused as he talked about having dairy animals on pasture and bringing the next generation into farming through a share-milking business partnership. His practical experience with forage species and replacement heifers is second to none.

Shannon Hayes, author of *The Grass-Fed Gourmet*, explained how Americans spent 68 billion dollars last year on kitchen renovations yet actually do very little cooking -- only averaging 30 minutes together at the family meal. She emphasized the importance of locally grown meat, dairy and eggs raised on good pastures and the associated health benefits for consumers. She also had keen insight on marketing, and also educating consumers about cooking techniques to bring out the best in grass-fed meats.

Shannon's words were a great prelude to a truly awesome lunch featuring Sweet Meadow Farm's grass-fed beef, lamb, pork and turkey prepared exquisitely by the Dibleys Inn chefs. The comradery and discussions at the dinner table among attendees was truly memorable.

The afternoon sessions featured more in-depth discussions on pastured poultry from Dr. Ben Lucio, Jim McLaughlin, Jeff Mattocks and Mike Carroll. These gentlemen laid the groundwork for a successful poultry venture and also discussed the Avian Flu concern. The livestock session focused on contract grazing, marketing and multi-species grazing strategies. Mike Debach, artisan butcher from Leona Meats led a spirited group on the benefits of grass-based genetics as it relates to meat quality, flavor and cutout ratios of beef animals.

The afternoon dairy track featured Onondaga County grass-based dairyman Pete Mapstone and his thoughts on maintaining top production throughout the grazing season. Ideas for grazing replacement heifers and working with different forage species were explored. An organic dairy farmer roundtable discussion consisting of farmers Kevin Engelbert, Paul Knapp, Dave Stratton and Charles Blood ended the day on a positive note. Participants felt inspired to explore all the opportunities of pasture based farming.

The "Strategies For Going Grass-Fed" conference was made possible by the support, vision and spirit of the Center for Agriculture Development & Entrepreneurship, Inc., Central NY RC&D Project, Inc., Northeast SARE, NY Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Madison, Onondaga and Oneida Co. Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Cornell Small Farms Program, The GRAZE-NY



(L-R) Conference organizer Troy Bishopp with NYS Assemblyman Bill Magee and Agriculture Commissioner Patrick Brennan.



A capacity crowd of 200 awaits a lunch featuring grass-fed beef, lamb, pork and turkey.

Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida, Madison, Cayuga and Onondaga Counties, USDA/NRCS, Chenango County Ag. Development Council, American Pastured Poultry Producers Assoc., Oneida Co. Ag. Economic Development, Cornell University Dept. of Animal Science, Country Folks Magazine, Sweet Meadow Farm, Cornerstone Farms, Fertrell Miners, Williams Fence Company, CROPP Organic Valley, Tru-Test Inc., Kings Agri-Seeds, Adirondack North Country Assoc., Penny Nutrition, Wayne Perry Farm, Fencing, Restora-Life Minerals, LLC, Lakeview Organic Grain and Bishopp Family Farm.



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MARKETING**Idea From Iowa: County Policies To Promote Local Food**

Iowa has the highest production of corn and the second highest production of soybeans in the United States. How did little Woodbury County pass ordinances promoting local foods?

Iowa's Woodbury County has some of the richest farmland in the state. Unlike much of Iowa, the landscape in Woodbury isn't flat. The Loess Hills, carved over millennia by the snaking Missouri River, create steep

ridges and gently rolling hills. The soil is gritty, sifting easily through your fingers. During a rainstorm, loess soil washes quickly down the cliffs. Local farmers constantly battle soil erosion.

COUNTY FOOD POLICY? YES!

In the near future, Woodbury County's farmscape could look very different. In June 2005, the County passed an Organics Conversion Policy, offering up to \$50,000 annually in property tax rebates for those who convert from conventional to organic farming practices. The policy is intended to address a growing problem in Iowa: rural population decline resulting from the growth of large commodity farms. Because the average age of a farmer in Woodbury County is 57, over half of the county's farmland will need to change hands in the next 10-15 years. The County needs new farmers to continue its agricultural tradition.

"We want to make it economically possible for young families to enter farming for our next generation of farmers," says George Boykin, Chairman of the Woodbury County Board of Supervisors, in a Woodbury County press release. On January 10, 2006, the County also became the first in the United States to mandate the purchase of locally grown, organic food. The Local Food Purchase Policy requires Woodbury County departments to purchase locally grown, organic food from within a 100 mile radius for regular city use.

The policy has the potential to shift \$281,000 in annual food purchases to a local farmer-operated cooperative, increasing local demand and spurring increased production and processing. The policy also helps build connections between area farmers. Since the county must work with a contractor and broker, the farmers must network to aggregate supply. Together they are building an infrastructure that supports a locally-owned and controlled food system.

The Local Food Purchase Policy supports the Organic Conversion Policy passed last summer, providing a market for the farmers who convert to organic production. "In the end, we anticipate a quality local food brand emerging from the increased economic activity in our area," says Rob Marquese, the Director of Rural Economic Development for Woodbury County, in a press release.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

In a state where 90 percent of the land is used for agriculture, Woodbury County's organic and local food ordinances could serve as a catalyst for transforming Iowa's agricultural landscape. With a graying farm workforce and population losses, Iowa's rural communities need fresh ideas for retaining younger people and building economically viable regions. The Woodbury policies, while innovative, did not emerge from a vacuum. Nor will their existence immediately transform Western Iowa's agricultural landscape. Still, what makes a Woodbury County happen?

First, the support of key county officials. Rob Marquese, the Director of Rural Economic Development for Woodbury County, already believed that local, agriculture-based economies were key to revitalizing rural communities. If he wanted to prove this to a larger audience of county economic development officials, he needed hard data and credible numbers to back up his claims.

Some of that data came from research coordinated by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, which is well regard-

ed for exploring and cultivating alternatives to conventional agriculture. The Regional Food Systems Working Group, funded by the Leopold Center and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, has also been a valuable resource for the Woodbury County developments.

In addition to providing assistance in Woodbury County, the Leopold Center has worked with Iowa State's Center for Transportation Research and Education to develop a new tool that can help local groups make the case for supporting community-based food systems. The Iowa Produce Market Potential Calculator is helping users explore new or expand existing markets for fresh produce.

MEASURING ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Using supply and demand data from the calculator, Rich Pirog, the Leopold Center's Marketing and Food Systems Research Program Leader, and Iowa State University economist Dave Swenson examined what would happen to Iowa's economy if 25 percent of the fruits and vegetables consumed in Iowa were grown in the state. They determined that total new sales in Iowa would increase by nearly \$140 million, and \$54.2 million to additional labor income would be paid to 2,030 job holders, of which 190 would be working on farms.

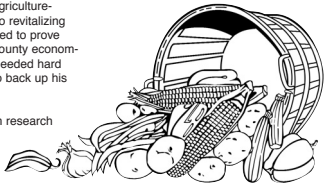
"We want to help groups make a better case for investing in local and regional food enterprises," says Pirog. "The Iowa Produce Calculator is one tool that can help provide the numbers so often lacking in making that better case."

Additionally, demand for and awareness of local foods in Woodbury County is strong, thanks to a solid network of NGOs and farmers markets. With a strongly mobilized community, the community support will likely continue after external funding from foundations ends. Additionally, the increased demand provides an incentive for farmers and processing plants to work together to determine the best ways to serve the community.

Over time, Woodbury County will showcase how county policies work in building sustainable regional food systems. In the meantime, The Leopold Center will continue studying the conditions and criteria needed to build resilient regional food systems. Although those criteria will vary by region, the Center expects to discover the essential elements common to all regions and construct a workable model for food and fiber businesses to foster rural development.

For more information on Woodbury County's Organic Conversion Policy or its Local Food Purchase Policy, visit www.woodbury-ia.com.

This article first appeared in the January 2006 edition of FAS Update.



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Small Farm Quarterly Youth Pages

This issue of the SFQ Youth Pages features three young writers from the Cornell Junior Dairy Leaders program. This PRO-DAIRY program recruits 16-19 year olds for a series of 8 workshops over the course of a year. It features real-world learning; interaction and discussions with college students, faculty and industry professionals; and the opportunity for young people to explore career options in agriculture.

The Junior Dairy Leaders have a lot to do and see. The class travels around the North-east and Wisconsin learning about different types of dairy and agribusiness management styles and ideas. Other opportunities include resume development, internships

(opportunities), regional seminars, and public presentations with use of computer technology.

The program also helps develop leadership skills needed to make positive changes and contributions to the dairy industry and to communities, using a team approach to problem solving.



"The Junior Dairy Leader program was a great experience and opportunity to meet kids with the same interests as me from around the state and I established friendships that will last a lifetime," says Hannah Young, class of 2004. "It helped me decide which college is right for me, and exposed me to all the unique opportunities there are in the dairy industry. I grew as an individual and learned more about myself and some key skills to be successful in a career. I cherish every minute I spent in the program."

For more information about Junior Dairy Leaders and 4H Dairy programs, visit www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy or www.ansci.cornell.edu/4H/dairycattle/index.html.

The Power of Agriculture - Experience It!

By Sarah Moss, Age 18, Chautauqua County 4-H

Growing up on a farm has given me many opportunities to explore the field of agriculture. It all started when I was just 12 days old and my parents, Glen and Diane Moss, took me along to look at a farm that became the farm I grew up on.

We currently have 130 cows and 120 replacement heifers. Our herd consists of mostly Holsteins, but we have about 30 Ayrshires mixed in, about 10 crossbreds, one Guernsey and one Brown Swiss.

My younger brother and I have the responsibility of raising the replacement heifers. Each day after school we go to the barn and care for the heifers and calves. Then we go to the parlor and freestall barn to assist with other chores. During the summer I help harvest crops. We also rotationally graze our herd during the summer months.

Over time our operation has grown and changed. We built a freestall barn and a milking parlor so that we can care for more cows with the same amount of labor. We no longer grow our own corn silage; we purchase it from a neighbor. And last summer we renovated our old stall barn so house weaned calves in 4 different pens. This year we are working on making our yard larger so that we can have some of our haylage to use as much ourselves and put it all into upright silos. Also, our line of older equipment will last longer. Lots to think and learn about!

My interest in agriculture doesn't stop at home. I'm an active member in the Pine Valley FFA chapter, the Dairy Judging team, the Field and Forage team, and the Chautauqua County 4-H team. I enjoy exhibiting my 4-H cows at the fair; currently I have 3 heads of Ayrshires. Last year I served as a Jr. Superintendent at the Chautauqua County Fair. I was also given the opportunity to represent New York State at the Dairy Management Contest held at the All American Show at Harrisburg PA.

Three years ago I participated in the Dairy Youth Explorers program. I am currently a member of the Junior Dairy Leader Class, a PRO-DAIRY program run by Debbie and Dave Grusenmeyer, with the help of many sponsors. This program allowed me to attend the National 4-H Dairy Conference



Showing cattle with some of my 4-H friends at the county fair. L-R: Jamie Rhinehart, Morgan OagWalker, Sarah Moss.

and the World Dairy Expo held in Wisconsin. The program has allowed me to meet many new people from across the state and share our experiences from agriculture backgrounds. It has also allowed me to look at the many different management practices of dairy farmers across the state.

Growing up in a rural area and on a family farm, I can appreciate many things. There are instances when nature can change plans for the day, so we need to adjust

our schedule. There are other times when we can gaze at the stars after a late night calving, watch the sun rise and set while doing chores, smell the spring rain, the first hay that is cut, and the falling of the leaves in the woods. I have learned to appreciate a family working together toward a common goal. We are able to see each other every day and are able to confide in each other every night. When fixing the fence in the spring



Here I am learning how to IV a cow during a Junior Dairy Leader workshop.

as a family we pack a picnic lunch and enjoy the promises that spring brings. These little things have shaped my life and have greatly influenced me.

All of these experiences have made an impact on me and because of them I am ready to embrace the opportunities available in agriculture.

AGRICULTURE AND YOU

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www.cerp.cornell.edu/aitc



Eggshell Seed-Starting Pots!

Materials:

Half eggshells, gently washed and dried
Potting soil
Seeds

Empty egg carton
Pin or thumbtack
Spray bottle (optional)

Gently wash and dry the eggshell halves.

Get an adult's help to poke a tiny hole in the bottom with a pin or thumbtack, then set it in the empty egg carton.

Read the seed package to see what special planting needs the seeds have.

Fill the eggshells with soil/patting. Don't pack the soil too tightly!

Drop in 2 or 3 seeds and cover with more soil, according to the directions on the seed packet.

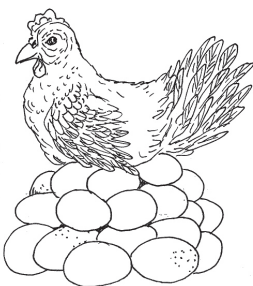
Spray the soil with a mist of water from the spray bottle (or gently drip water on with your fingers).

Keep the egg carton in a room that gets a lot of sunlight and isn't too warm or too cold, and keep the soil moist.

Watch for the young plants to sprout!

At the proper planting time, place the young plant, eggshell and all, in the garden's soil.

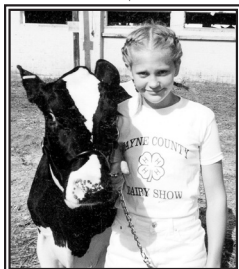
What do you think happens to the eggshell as the plant grows?



Living and Loving Farming

By Abigail Andrew, Age 17, *Spirit of Tomorrow 4-H Club, Wayne County*

Growing up as a young farm kid, the days were long and the work was (seemingly) endless. Summers are what my sisters and I lived for, trying to break our 4-H show heifers wearing rubber galoshes and our parents old college t-shirts...usually ending up with rocks in our



Abigail with Angel at the Wayne County Fair.

hands and cuts on our knees. Then of course we'd make our way to the bathroom for an iodine and Band-Aid Party...

"Bored" or "nothing to do" wasn't a part of our vocabulary. Mornings consisted of calf and heifer chores. These, we thought, were never ending and always wondered why calves weren't born pail trained, as we clasped our hands, withdrawing from the calf's head in the bucket and inspecting our cuticles. At lunchtime, we'd snack on urine apples from our farm's apple tree while we worked on perfecting our sandbox town behind the horse barn. Then we'd finish the day with another set of calf chores and rounding out the evening by accidentally playing hide and seek in a patch of nettles, and you could imagine my mother had the wonderful task of putting six screaming girls in the back of our station wagon and taking us home to a bath. Yep, we were farm girls; dirt under our fingernails, tangled and lop-sided ponytails, and boots without socks. What great memories!

A big part of living and loving farming for me and my family was and is 4-H. It gives us projects to work on as a family and a way to

meet with other people with similar interests. My first memory of 4-H was as a Cloverbud, preparing and showing our heifers at the fair and trying to keep my whites clean just long enough to receive my green Cloverbud ribbon and then springing to help operate the 4-H Dairy booth. I also modeled my first sewing project back then -- elastic-waistband shorts, made from cotton Holstein cow figure fabric -- and let me tell you, I was quite proud of them.

Although my responsibilities on the farm have increased from calf chores to herd health and more, I continue to get excited about exploring new agricultural opportunities. These experiences have opened doors for me already. Because of my know-how on handling, caring and treating animals on our farm I've found a place on the Wayne Co. 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl team.

I am also a part of the Jr. Dairy Leaders Program through Cornell University. Our first trip was to attend the National 4-H Dairy Conference, held on the campus of the University of Madison in Wisconsin. While I was there I listened to speakers presenting about all different aspects of life and agriculture, smelt the

beautiful waters of Wisconsin (at five in the morning), tasted malted milk balls from a brewery and felt the physical pain of barn dancing for four days straight.

These experiences have affected me so much as a person. When I was younger I thought 4-H was just a clever way to trick me into learning to cook and sew. But now I can see I've gained skills that are excellent tools for a young person to possess, such as the art of public speaking and presenting, dairy judging and learning to give oral reasons (which I believe comes naturally to no one).

The knowledge I've gained in my years of 4-H has been a blessing but not end. I've been taught that personal achievements are accomplishments, individual goals are some times challenging and average expectancies can be exceeded. My years in 4-H are numbered but, my memories and experiences will last a lifetime.

These experiences, after all, will help me continue to live and love farming.

Broadened Horizons

By Chad Wall, Age 18, *Jefferson County*

Wow, am I tired. Not only do I think this every time I have come from a great week-end with my dairy leaders group, but right now I am beat. I mean come on -- I just finished delivering piglets, eight to be exact, and it's way past my bedtime. But that's all right because everyone knows that farming isn't for the weak.

My name is Chad Wall and I am a great example for showing that the NYS Junior Dairy Leaders program isn't just for kids from dairy farms. If we were to take a look at my background I have almost no experience with the dairy industry. Besides raising pigs I also raise sheep, Boer goats, and beef cattle. I have shown many species at county fair and have even taken my animals to state fair for the past three years.

My family's farm owned a little bit of everything on it, except for one of New York's greatest industrious animals, the dairy cow. My first experience in dairy was showing a dairy cow at county fair as part of the super showmanship contest. Since then my dairy experiences have really developed.

I have known for years that I want to become a veterinarian in the future. However, there were still some areas where my understanding was lacking, including dairy cows. So, I started to seek out some experiences. Through FFA I participated in cattle judging. And, then I found the Junior Dairy Leaders Program.

Through the Dairy Leaders program I have had so many experiences and taken part in many activities that I know will help me in the future. Not only have I learned and

practiced giving IV's to cows, doing hoof care, checking for ketosis and mastitis; but I have also made friends, and met people that are great contacts for the future.

Our team attended the National Dairy Conference where we met people from all across the United States. We have toured grazing, rotary, traditional, and even self-trucking farms in various states. A flood of information and knowledge that I never knew has been presented to me.

I have broadened my horizons, and learned so much in the process.



Here I am taking a "stab" at giving an IV to a calf.



This is me with my Dairy Prospects classmates, learning how to IV a calf.



Here we're learning how to take blood from the tailhead vein.

Want to write for the Youth Pages? Writers need not be 4-H members. Please submit your article or letter to:

Celeste Carmichael, 4-H Youth Development Program Specialist, CCE State 4-H Youth Development Office,
340 Roberts Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853

Phone 607-255-4799, Fax 607-255-0788, <http://cce.cornell.edu/4h>

MANAGING RISK

Get Help With Health Insurance

Your family may qualify for low- or no-cost plans subsidized by many Northeast states.

By Maire Ullrich

Editor's note: This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets.

When it comes to health insurance, many farm families feel like they are between a rock and a hard place. Without an off-farm job that provides benefits, high premiums for private policies make health coverage seem like an unaffordable luxury.

But farming is dangerous work. And for children, a farm can be a dangerous place to live. Without health insurance, a serious injury or illness can quickly force families to liquidate farm assets to cover hospital and other expenses. In a flash, a freak accident to you or a family member can cost you the hard-earned equity you've built up in your farm.

Fortunately, you may have alternatives to expensive private plans that can help you minimize these catastrophic risks — as well as help you keep small health problems from escalating into major expenses — at a fraction of the cost. You won't have to fret about how much it's going to cost when deciding whether or not you (or your children) need to seek help for a minor health problem or for preventive care.

Even if you don't qualify for Medicaid due to ownership and equity restrictions, many Northeast states subsidize low- or no-cost health insurance plans. Investigating these options may help you save on premiums or broaden your coverage.

Your first step is to learn about the basics of how these state-based programs work. (Read on.) But the devil is in the details, and the details vary from program to program and state to state.

CHILDREN FIRST

If you have some equity in your farm, you probably do not qualify for Medicaid. But in some states, your children might qualify if your income is below a certain amount. To find out, you need to ask state-level agencies. (The specific offices that manage the programs vary by state.) There are also separate state programs for children that cover basic care such as annual exams and vaccinations.

"All of the Northeast states have subsidized low-cost insurance programs for children who don't qualify for Medicaid."

All of the Northeast states have, at a minimum, subsidized low-cost insurance programs for children who don't qualify for Medicaid. Eligibility is based on income and the size of your household. The income thresholds generally start at 150 percent of the poverty level and rise to as high as 400 percent. (Farm program payments may be considered as income, at least in part, and could affect your eligibility.)

In 2005, for example, the poverty level was \$9,570 for the first person and \$3,260 for each additional family member. So the 150-percent threshold for a family of four in 2005 was \$29,025. Only spouses, children and parents or legal guardians count, and pregnant women count as two.

Some states offer similar programs for adults. In addition to meeting financial criteria, you usually must have been without insurance for 90 days.

"Each plan is different. You need to fully investigate what each offers — and what the premiums, co-pays, and deductibles are."

Most state programs subsidize private insurance companies to cover you and others who meet eligibility requirements. Private insurance providers will vary depending on where you live. Their premiums, when not fully subsidized by the state, will vary between companies and potentially between counties in the same state. In New York, the monthly premiums range from about \$200 for an individual to \$600 to \$900 for a family. Co-payments may apply and they range from \$10 for prenatal visits to \$500 for in-patient hospital services.

YOU'RE IN. YOU'RE OUT.

Fluctuating farm income can make keeping continuous coverage challenging. Your kids may qualify for Medicaid one year, but not the next if your income rises. In some states, if you qualify for Medicaid you aren't allowed to "buy up" into the state insurance program for your kids even if you want to. If you qualify for Medicaid, that's what you get. State programs usually require annual applications that you must complete by certain dates or risk losing coverage.

When choosing a health plan, you should think about the doctors you want and the services your family needs, and match those with the health plans available to you. Make sure the doctor or other providers you want to see participate in the health plan you choose. After you join a plan, you must use the hospitals, clinics and doctors that work with the plan. You won't be able to use your current providers unless they participate with the insurance company you choose, or you are willing to pay out of pocket.

Bouncing between state programs and Medicaid can complicate choosing a provider. Not all providers accept Medicaid. If you don't want to switch providers every time you're moved from state-subsidized programs to Medicaid, choose providers who accept both.

WHAT'S COVERED?

Most of the state-subsidized programs for both adults and children provide comprehensive health insurance coverage. You will have a regular doctor, get regular checkups and see specialists, if needed. Coverage may include emergency services, testing, equipment, supplies, vision, speech and hearing services, mental and behavioral

healthcare, dependency services, radiation, chemotherapy, hospice and dental care.

Each plan is different. You need to fully investigate what each offers — and what the premiums, co-pays, and deductibles are — so you can choose wisely which is best for you. Many programs offer dental and prescription drug coverage along with the plan or as an add-on for an additional fee.

In states that don't routinely provide subsidized health insurance for adults, the state may provide coverage under special circumstances. These "special conditions" may include pregnancy/prenatal care, cancer, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, drug dependency, mammograms, diabetes, mental health conditions, specific disabilities (like blindness), children with special needs, and others.

Some other things to look out for when comparing programs:

- Some programs may put a "binder" on enrollment. In an effort to recoup costs, many social service programs have a legal right to part of your estate when you die or sell. This practice is termed "estate recovery." Depending on your personal situation, you may decide insurance is valuable enough to accept the lien.
- If you or someone in your family has a "pre-existing condition," find out what the law in your state says about whether or not insurance companies can reject you on that basis.
- Remember that the fate of your state-subsidized insurance coverage may be determined by your state's annual budget. Most states work on a first-come, first-served basis. That means that if the state cuts funding for health insurance subsidies, those who joined the program most recently will be the first to be cut. At least one Northeast state offers insurance for children all of the time but to adults only when the state's coffers are full.

BE ASSERTIVE!

Now that you have a grip on these basics, follow up by studying program websites and/or calling program hotlines and asking them to send you more information on programs in your state. (See For More Information chart.) Some of the websites are difficult to navigate. If you get frustrated, call the hotline number and ask for written information.

Be sure you understand the rules, eligibility requirements, and coverage for the program or programs you think might work best for you. You'll need to do some number crunching on your own, particularly if you're considering moving from a private plan to a state plan. Work up a couple of scenarios of when you might need insurance and compare what would be covered under each option. Families with special health needs may not get the security they need under public programs.

Don't be shy about asking questions. If you don't think you are getting helpful,

accurate information from any of the health department, social services or insurance company employees you speak with, ask to speak with someone else. If you need help, discuss your plans with your insurance agent, accountant or Extension Educator.

"Keep in mind that many of the other folks applying for these programs do not have a business with land or other equity and fluctuating income. You may need to go the extra mile to explain your situation clearly."

The information is complicated — not to mention the bureaucracy. Keep in mind that many of the other folks applying for these programs do not have a business with land or other equity and fluctuating income. You may need to go the extra mile to explain your situation clearly. If you want good results, you need to be assertive.

The websites or printed information detail the application processes. In many states this will include an interview. Be prepared to bring at least last year's tax forms. You may also need deeds and titles for land and equipment.

Is this hard work? Sure. But when you consider the stakes — your family's health and the survival of your farm — it may be the best investment you can make.

Maire Ullrich, MBA, is a vegetable crops resource educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Farming is Good

By David Kline

Excerpted from the introduction of David Kline's book Great Possessions with permission from David Kline.

The year is a never-ending adventure. What many consider recreation we enjoy on our farm. This year we saw four firsts on our farm: our first Kentucky warbler; our first luna and imperial moths; and after waiting for over thirty years, I saw my first giant swallowtail butterfly.

The aesthetic pleasures of diversified farming are obvious. From spring through fall the color of the fields are constantly changing. I like to look at our farm as an artist would behold his or her painting – a variation of colors and design, never a bare spot of canvas left exposed. The bare spots on our farm, such as cow paths, are covered in November with strawy horse manure to prevent erosion. I use the manure spreader, which works fine as a mulcher. The land is now ready for the rains and storms of winter.

Probably the greatest difference between Amish farming and agribusiness is the supportive community life we have. Let me give an example. When we cut our wheat in early summer (we cut about half of a thirteen-acre field in one day), the whole family, after the evening milking, went shocking. It was one of those clear, cool June evenings.

Simply perfect. Tim, our eighteen-year-old son, and I each took a row, while my wife, Elsie, and ten year-old son, Michael, took another row. Two of our daughters, Kristine, sixteen, and Ann, twelve took the fourth row. Eight year-old Emily carried the water jug. Row by row we worked our way across the field, the girls talking and giggling while they worked and Michael explaining in excited detail some project he

had underway in the shop. When we reached the top of the hill we stood together and watched the sun slip behind a brilliant magenta-colored cloud and then sink beneath the horizon. From far to the south came the mellow whistle of an upland sandpiper. Tim said, to no one in particular, "Shocking together with the family is fun." He spoke for all of us. Then we heard voices from the next hill and saw three neighbors shocking toward us from the far side of the field. One of the girls excitedly remarked, "Seven rows at a time. That is speed." Soon all the bundles were set up in shocks and everyone came along to the house for ice cream and visiting.

The assurance and comfort of having caring neighbors is one of the reasons we enjoy our way of farming so much. Eight years ago I had an accident that required surgery and a week in the hospital. My wife tells me the first words I said to her in the recovery room were, "Get me out of here; the wheat has to be cut." Of course she couldn't and I need not have worried because we had neighbors.

While Dad cut the wheat with the binder, the neighbors shocked it. When our team tired my brother brought his four-horse team, and by superintending the twelve-acre field was cut and shocked.

This year the neighbor who had been in first to help us needed help himself. Since a bout with pneumonia in July he hadn't been able to do much. So last Thursday six teams and mowers cut his eleven acres of alfalfa hay. Then on Saturday afternoon, with four teams and wagons and two hay loaders, and fifteen men and about as many boys put the hay in his barn in less than two hours. We spent almost as much time afterwards, sitting in a circle beneath the maple tree with cool drinks and fresh cookies, listening as one of the neighbors told of his recent trip out west. He and a



Cutting oats with a horse-drawn binder. (photographer unknown)

friend visited draft-horse breeders in Illinois, Iowa, and eastern Nebraska, and what a story he had to tell: of nice horses and nice people, of the worst erosion he had ever seen from the Iowa hills following eight inches of rain.

I couldn't help thinking of my young friend who got married last September and then bought his dad's machinery and livestock and rented the farm. He and his wife really worked hard on that debt. Milking by hand, selling grade B milk, tending a good group of sows, cultivating corn twice, some three times, using no herbicides, they are nearing the end of their first year of farming on their own, and most of their debts are paid off.

He didn't tell me this, he's much too humble, but he did say this to me while threshing, "You know, farming is good."

David and his wife Elsie, along with their family, milk about 40 cows near Fredericksburg, Ohio. David has authored two books: *Great Possessions* and *Scratching the Woodchuck*. He also edits *Farming Magazine*, published by Friends of the Agarians. Sample copies are available for \$5. Subscriptions are \$18/year for four issues, or \$32 for two years. Write: P.O. Box 85, Mt. Hope, OH 44660; e-mail: farmingmag@aol.com. More information at www.farmingmagazine.net.



Resource Spotlight

Low- or No-Cost Health Insurance

To find out about low- or no-cost health insurance programs in your state, visit these websites or call hotlines to request written information or ask questions.

State	Program	Coverage	Phone	Website *
Connecticut	Husky	19 and under. For lowest income group provides free health care for parents who live with child or for a relative caregiver (such as a grandparent) who lives with the child.	877-284-8759	www.huskyhealth.com
Connecticut	Small Group	Not a subsidized plan. Compiles list of "Blue Ribbon" insurance providers for small businesses.	860-297-3800	www.ct.gov/cid/cwp/view.asp?e=1260&q=306846
Maine	MaineCare	Families (with children 18 and under), pregnant women.	877-543-7669	www.maine.gov/dhhs/OIAS/services/cubcare/CubCare.htm
Massachusetts	MassHealth	Many options for children, families, adults and small businesses.	800-841-2900	www.mass.gov (type in MassHealth in search)
New Hampshire	HealthyKids	19 and under.	877-464-2447	www.nhhealthykids.com
New York	Child Health Plus	Under 19.	800-698-4543	www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/chplus
New York	Family Health Plus	Individuals, couples and families.	877-934-7587	www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/fhplus
New York	Healthy New York	Self-employed, small business owners (fewer than 50 employees) and their employees.	866-432-5849	www.healthyny.com
Rhode Island	Rtite Care	Families with children up to 19, pregnant women.	401-462-5300	www.dhs.ri.gov/dhs/famchild/shicare.htm
Rhode Island	Rtite Share	Helps pay for insurance through employers.	401-462-5300	www.dhs.ri.gov/dhs/famchild/shicare.htm
Pennsylvania	CHIP	Under 19.	800-986-5437	chipcoverspakids.com
Pennsylvania	Adult Basic	Ages 19 to 64.	800-462-2742	www.helpinpa.state.pa.us
Vermont	Dr. Dynasaur	Under 18 and pregnant women.	800-250-8427	www.ovha.state.vt.us/DocD.cfm
Vermont	VHAP	Adults 18 and over.	888-665-9993	www.ovha.state.vt.us/VHAP.cfm

* Some services offer sign-up via the web, but online forms are usually located on the main social services sites.

Conserving Grassland Birds

Northeast farmers can help stop the decline of Meadowlarks, Bobolinks and other grassland species.

By Jim Ochterski

One of the joys of being a farmer, amidst the crazy schedule, low crop prices, and weather woes, is the chance to see and feel connected to the wildlife that shares the farmstead, especially birds. It might be a winter flock of wild turkey in the corn stubble, ducks on the pond, or a pair of owls cruising low over a mown field at dusk. Of course, starlings contaminating the silage or the winged thieves that make off with hybrid grapes leave much to be desired. But on the whole, most birds are a pleasure to see and hear.

No doubt if you have been paying attention to Meadowlarks and Bobolinks, you are not seeing and hearing as many now as in the past. They are disappearing, unable to find the grassland habitat that was once very

widespread in the Northeast. Likewise, obscure grassland species like Henslow's sparrow and Vesper sparrow are declining all over the region, and across North America.

HABITAT LOSS BLAMED IN PART ON FARMS

Many bird researchers point to "modern farming practices" as one major reason for the decline of grassland birds. The practices deemed detrimental for grassland birds include early first cuttings of hay, manure spreading in grass hayfields, rotation of hay to row crops, and overstocking grazing pastures.

Damage to grassland bird habitat on farms is usually a side-effect of adopting a particular agronomic technique. Farmers are not intentionally going after these birds or the fields they may occupy. In the case of hay-

fields, the first cutting is taken as early as it is to maximize the nutritional value of grasses. Crops are rotated to manage nutrient loads from year to year and to reduce problems of high pest populations. Unfortunately, crop rotation sets up habitat that may be only temporary. In the case of grassland birds, temporary habitat is as useless as no habitat at all.

But some recent field studies are showing that blaming modern farming for the

loss of grassland birds is too broad a brushstroke. In fact, some farms in may become a refuge for many kinds of grassland birds. A 2005 inventory of pastures on 24 farms in the Central Southern Tier showed that active livestock pastures do harbor grassland birds, while providing livestock with all necessary nutrition. Birds like Eastern meadowlark, Savannah sparrow, Bobolink, and some species of concern are using and likely breeding in pastures. So it depends on what kind of farming practices you use.

BENEFITS TO THE FARM

There are several reasons why farm operators should consider taking steps to conserve grassland habitat, in hayfields, pastures, and idle fields. First, it is a compelling argument for farmland protection in any community. If farms can help protect fragile wildlife species like grassland birds, they are providing a significant public benefit in the name of land stewardship.

Second, grassland birds benefit farms by reducing populations of insect pests. All grassland bird nestlings exist solely on a diet of weevils, caterpillars, cutworms, and flies brought to them by their parents. Similarly, turkey and pheasant poulters require protein-rich insects for the first few weeks of their lives.



Grassland birds, including pheasants, need the cover provided by standing hay until about July 15th to successfully fledge. This farmer left part of the hayfield (in back) unmowed. Photographer: Jim Ochterski

Some farms can use grassland bird conservation as a marketing angle (think "bird-friendly" milk or meat), provided they can back up those claims with appropriate conservation practices. Cost-share opportunities like the USDA Grassland Reserve Program can provide some farms a financial benefit, once they commit themselves to good grassland preservation techniques.

HOW TO MANAGE FARMLAND FOR GRASSLAND BIRDS

1. Assess your current hayfield and pasture resources. On a map or aerial photograph, note which fields have the best potential for grassland bird habitat retention. These are fields of at least 10 acres, dominated by grasses and containing up to 20-25% other plant species. The bigger the space, the better for grassland bird habitat. It helps if the grassy habitat is extended by adjacent pastures, idle grassy fields, other hayfields, or even mown lawns.

2. Evaluate your hay and forage needs to meet current and long-term production goals. You either have surplus hay, just enough, or not enough. This varies from year to year, so think about typical supplies, not the extremes. Consider what level of quality is best for your farm and what you need to do to make adequately nourishing hay. Delaying hay cutting for conservation or other reasons will compromise the optimal nutritional quality of hay. Late-cut hay has lower moisture content, lower digestibility, a higher rate of shattering, and lower protein.

To maximize both yield and quality, grass hay should be cut at boot stage - just before or at head emergence; grass quality declines rapidly after heading. Delaying the cutting a week or two to allow for grassland birds to fledge will usually lead to hay that is essentially over-mature, but still potentially useful. Farms with animals that can tolerate moderately lower nutritive values - horse, sheep, dairy heifers, and mature beef - can often use this later-cut hay.

3. Identify excess fields. These fields may not be critical for early hay mowing, or may usually be too wet for early mowing. These fields can form the base of a grassland conservation effort designed to maintain bird habitat. Late maturing varieties of hay grasses may be

used in these fields to maintain better hay quality.

4. Observe the bird species that appear in hayfields and pastures. Farm operators curious to know which birds are already using their pastures should solicit the assistance of a knowledgeable birdwatcher, or obtain an audio guide to bird songs of the Eastern United States (available at libraries and bookstores). In the spring and early summer, birds will be singing in the habitat daily. It is best to walk slowly around a hayfield or pasture in the morning, listening carefully and taking note of the different songs.

5. Consult with conservation educators and technicians. These folks can help you develop a schedule of mowing and rotation to balance farm needs with overall bird habitat. You can develop your own plan, but it is best to have a conservation specialist review the specifics to make sure you are not overlooking important details about your farm needs. Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) field crop specialists are located in most CCE county offices across NY State to help you make the most of your productive conservation needs.

JOIN THE EFFORT

Grassland bird conservation in hayfields and pastures can be as rewarding as it is challenging. Efforts made by many farms in one region or community will eventually attract potentially significant populations of grassland birds. As knowledgeable stewards with a deep and rich tradition of conservation awareness, farmers can lead this environmental success story.

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Lightly grazed pastures such as this provide good nesting habitat for some grassland birds such as the Savannah sparrow and Eastern meadowlark. Photographer: Jim Ochterski

Resource Spotlight More on Grassland Bird Conservation

Cornell Cooperative Extension has developed two new technical bulletins explaining how to blend hay and pasture productivity with grassland habitat preservation. These bulletins are titled "Hayfield Management and Grassland Bird Conservation" and "Enhancing Pastures for Grassland Bird Habitat." A third bulletin, "Transforming Fields into Grassland Bird Habitat" is directed toward other rural landowners who have large fields to manage, irrespective of a farm interest. All of these publications are available as free downloads at the website titled "Grassland Birds in Fields and on Farms" <http://scnyat.cce.cornell.edu/grassland>, or you can request a print version from your local Cooperative Extension office.

Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service personnel, and Soil and Water Conservation District technicians can also help you better understand how to develop grassland habitat.



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With the short growing season in the Northeastern U.S., greenhouses are essential for starting early crops and being ready for opening day at the local farmers' market or CSA. Holcomb Farm CSA, West Granby, CT.



One of the area's youngest farmers, Sean Stanton at Blue Hill Farm, often chooses historic breeds and old world methods over more conventional animals and techniques. Sean can be seen driving his Norwegian Fjorde through downtown Great Barrington making deliveries and picking up compost from the Berkshire Coop and this year he learned to plow with his horses at nearby Farm Girl Farm CSA.



Harvesting grey and yellow oyster mushrooms at Blue Moon "Shrooms Farm in Housatonic, MA.



After a garden, backyard chickens are one of the easiest ways to connect with where your food comes from. For our family, it's also deepened our appreciation of the hard work that something as simple as an egg represents. Some farms, such as Flying Pigs Farm in Shushan, NY, even raise extra laying birds in the spring to offer their customers this grounding experience.

From Field To Plate

Photo Essay by Jason Houston

I photograph food and agriculture because I believe it's one of the most important, urgent, and universally relevant issues we face today. My concerns include my own family's health; the monumental injustice of global hunger; sustainability in our communities; preserving traditional knowledge from far off places; the irreplaceable loss of biodiversity; the yet to be realized threats of genetic engineering; the ethical treatment of animals; the instability of a cheap oil-dependent economy; the warming of our planet; and even terrorism.

Former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson underscored this in his resignation announcement where he counted our import-dependent food system and vanishing food and agriculture trade surpluses as one of our greatest national security liabilities. Proponents of industrial agriculture will insist we are too far gone to must buy into their technological solutions to satisfy an increasing demand.

But in a growing number of communities around the world farmers from small, independently-owned and community-focused farms are proving this assumption wrong and helping local economies grow and sustainable agriculture take hold. They represent real alternatives and I want to photograph them to contribute to the critical conversations we need to be having on where our food comes from and the sustainability and vitality of that system.

A solo exhibition of Houston's work titled "FARMER" will be at Spike Gallery in NYC until August 30. At the 32nd Annual NOFA Summer Conference at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, Aug. 10-13, Houston will be co-leading a workshop with Billie Best of the Regional Farm and Food Project, on talking to your community about agricultural issues. For more information on this project or these events, please visit: www.jasonhouston.com



Kelsey VanBeever feeds the pigs in their open forest run at Moon in the Pond Farm in Sheffield, MA.



Each spring Kevin Ford comes to shear the Horned Dorset sheep at Moon in the Pond Farm. Kevin is a professional hand blade shearer. He learned to shear on a visit to his ancestral Ireland in 1975. In 1991 after achieving master blade shearer certification from the New Zealand Wool Board, he sheared in the sheds of New Zealand's North Island. He now shears more than 5,000 sheep and goats each year from New England to the Carolinas.



Bags of organic potting soil ready for the first year of greenhouse planting at Great Barrington, MA's Newest CSA, Farm Girl Farm.



Seamus Wolfe tends the early season crops with his mother and sister at Wolfe Ridge Farm in Sheffield, MA.



In Berkshire County alone (pop approx 150,000) there are 8 farmers' markets, with many more in the surrounding areas. Most start quietly in mid-May with flowers and some early crops, but by early summer it's possible to eat completely locally -- and well -- shopping only at farmers' markets.